

Hugh Hamilton  
Trinity Presbyterian Church -Pensacola, FL  
September 15, 2019

### **WHAT DISCIPLES DO: 1. Disciples Seek The Lost**

Luke 15: 1-32

Lost Sheep. Lost coin. Lost Son.

Lost and Found. Lost and Found. Lost and Found.

Three parables, same theme: God seeks to find and to save all who are lost.

A woman in the parable sweeps the house looking for a tiny coin she lost. The coin, a drachma, was worth about a day's wages for a laborer; two drachma was the annual head tax paid into the temple treasury by every adult male Jew. Had this woman lost the family's tax money? Or was it the woman's meager wages? Would her family go hungry?

But Jesus asks, *"What woman having **TEN** silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?"* That detail adds drama... because in those days when a man married a woman, he would give her a chain on which would be strung ten coins. She would wear this token of love on her forehead even as women do in the Middle East today. Like a wedding band these coins represented the marital relationship. Often the husband's name was engraved on each silver coin. If a woman were caught in adultery, if she were unfaithful to her husband, one of the coins would be taken out leaving a gap to show that she had disgraced her marriage vows. So maybe this woman was frantically searching for the lost coin so people wouldn't get the wrong idea. Her reputation and marriage were at stake because of a faulty necklace.

When the woman did find her coin, she called her friends and neighbors, "Rejoice with me, for I have found what I had lost." Whether she found her life savings or her tax money or her dowry or her reputation, she rejoiced! Then Jesus adds, *"Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."* WOW! The angels rejoice when we repent? Yes! In three back to back parables Jesus repeats that God and the heavenly host rejoice over the sinner who comes home.

The Shepherd goes looking for the one lost sheep. The woman turns her house upside down searching the one lost coin! Does God ransack his universe for one lost soul? Yes! God cannot abide the loss of any person, and so God comes searching for you.

"Amazing Grace" is always listed among the favorite hymns. It tells a timeless story of being rescued from a life of sin by God's dramatic intervention, and the new life you now have. One of my minister buddies did his doctoral thesis on the use of country music in preaching. After interviewing several Nashville stars, including Johnny Cash, Pete observed where else can you can sing all night about lying, drinking, cussing, fighting, cheating, and then bring down the house with a final chorus of Amazing Grace? Even people who are not church goers are moved to tears when they sing, "I once was lost, but now I am found."

The Good News of the gospel is that you need not make yourself good enough before God will accept you, but rather that in Jesus God came to seek you and to save you by sacrificing himself. The Shepherd lay down his life for his sheep. God SEEKS you, FINDS you, SAVES you... because God *loves* you and never gives up on you! *"I once was lost, but now I am found."*

LOST SON: The Prodigal Son stresses that God welcomes home the sinner, even when we don't. God seeks the lost, even when we don't. God gives us what we need, not what we want...or think we deserve. Nor does God treat others based on the way WE THINK they deserve to be treated.

#### SIBLING RIVALRY:

How many of you are the oldest child in your family? - If you are, would you raise your hand?

O.K., thank you. Put your hand down.

Now, how many of you were the baby in your family? Would you raise your hand?

Thank you. Put your hand down.

Now, for those in the first group--the oldest children, how many of you felt like the baby of your family got away with things you never could have gotten away with?

Would you raise your hand, please? Ahh, sibling rivalry is alive and well!

The parable of the prodigal son is one of the most famous older sibling rivalry stories in all literature. Older son stays home and does as Dad requires; younger son leaves home and does as he pleases. Older son resents younger brother, and resents Dad being lenient when younger son comes back home.

**We have a bit of younger son in us.** We want to unload our lives of all that defines us and confines us: we reject our parents' authority, we quit going to church, we break the rules and defy the moral standards that have been passed down to us. We want to be free to do what we want to do in life. We move out on our own and do as we please. But somewhere along the way, we get lost. We lose our direction, we lose our boundaries; we wake up one morning in the far country, trapped by our selfish desires.

**We also have some elder son in us.** The word "*responsible*" haunts us. We know what needs to be done and see that it gets done. We see that nothing falls thru the cracks, we try to make everyone happy, we feel responsible for the family, for the farm, the business, the bills, the maintenance, the order. Then we get tired of being responsible! We resent the irresponsible people around us who don't carry their share of the load, who play when there's work to be done! We become resentful, especially at home, where, of all places, we should receive what we deserve, what is fair and just.

Both sons are welcomed home and invited into the party!

God invites us home no matter who we are, no matter how good we've been, or how bad.

God is determined to keep us in the family:

God greets us when we drag in from a far country after good times go bad;

God comes out to the lonely darkness of our strait-laced righteousness and begs us to come in and party with him.

**Jesus expects us to invite others to the party, to seek the lost and welcome them home.**

Seeking the lost is central to our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ.

We're intimidated by that calling and by the word Evangelism, and we're comfortable doing it, but you and I CAN DO EVANGELISM as part of our every-day life, in at least one of the following ways. (Thielen, 238)

**We can engage in lifestyle evangelism.** One of the best ways we can witness our faith to others is to live it. In multiple funerals last week, we celebrated stories and memories and characterizations of loved ones who inspired us and impacted our lives. When we, like they, live like Christ – when we show love and grace, compassion, service, social justice, patience and lovingkindness – we testify to others that we are people of God. People see how we live and act and think, *If that's what Christianity looks like, I'm interested.* St Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the gospel at all times; use words if necessary."

**We can engage in relational evangelism.** You don't have to approach strangers and try to save them to be an evangelist. In your own relationships you find opportunities to share your faith in God with people you know. You may simply let them know that your faith is important to you, that it grounds you, gives meaning and purpose to your life; you may share how faith in God gets you through hard times, or that your faith motivates you to serve others and that's WHY you sign up to volunteer. Relational evangelism can be a natural extension of your conversations with others, and you can have a huge impact on people for God!

**We can also engage in invitational evangelism.** Simply invite people to "come and see." Invite them to church for worship or to a special event, Wednesday Night Supper, Trunk or Treat, a small group, a Sunday School class, a workshop. Just "come and see" what our church and is doing and what we are about, and why we do these things for God and God's people. It's a simple and easy way to share faith – and it's effective! Repeatedly, studies show that the number one reason people first visit is church is because someone they know invited them to come!

**As Disciples, we are to seek the lost and invite them in.**

MOTEL PARTY: Tom Long, my professor of preaching, shares this story:

"I once was staying in a motel in a large city and was surprised to find, posted to the elevator door, a small handwritten notice that read, "Party Tonight! Room 210. 8:00pm. Everyone invited! "

I could hardly picture who would throw such a party, or for what reason, but I imagined that at 8:00, room 210 would be filled by an unlikely assortment of people: sales representatives seeking little relief from the tedium of the road; a vacationing couple tired of sightseeing; a bored traveler stopping overnight in the middle of a long journey, looking for a bit of festivity; a few inquisitive and wary motel employees, there because of professional responsibility; perhaps some young people who had slipped out of their parents' rooms, anxiously curious about what was happening in room 210

Alas, the sign by the elevator soon came down, replaced by a typewritten notice by the motel staff explaining that the original notice was a hoax, a practical joke. That made sense, of course, but in a way it was too bad. For a brief moment, those of us staying at the motel were tantalized by the possibility that there just might be a party going on somewhere to which we were all invited — a party where it didn't make much difference who we were when we walked in the door, or what motivate us to come; a party we could come to out of boredom, loneliness, curiosity, responsibility, eagerness to be in fellowship, or simply a desire to come and see what was happening a party where it didn't matter nearly as much what got us the door, as what would happen to us after we arrived.

Perhaps if there is to be such a party, the church is going to have to throw it (Long, 68— 69) .

God loves you without condition

God forgives you and welcomes you back when you are ready to come home

Even the angels rejoice when anyone who has been lost is found and repents.

Won't you let Christ bring you back home today,

And start again with God's help?

And won't you invite others with you into the party?

Thanks be to God!

Welcome home!

#### Sources

Tom Long, "The Prodigal Son," cited in *Word and Witness*, March 5, 1995.

Hamilton, Hugh. "The Angels Rejoice When We Repent." Trinity Presbyterian Church, Pensacola, FL  
September 12, 2004.

Thielen, Martin. "Disciples Seek People for Christ and Church" in *A Preacher's Guide to Lectionary Sermons*, ed, Jessica Miller Kelley. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press. 2016.

\09-15-19 What Disciples Do: 1. Disciples Seek the Lost.docx